



Atlantic States Marine Fisheries Commission

NEWS RELEASE

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
February 2, 2000

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ASMFC & NEFMC to Hold Scoping Hearings on Proposed Atlantic Herring Limited Entry Program

The Atlantic States Marine Fisheries Commission (Commission) and the New England Fishery Management Council (Council) will hold joint scoping hearings to gather public input on the issue of controlled access in the Atlantic herring fishery. Hearings are scheduled to be held in Maine, Massachusetts, Rhode Island, and New Jersey in mid to late February.

Currently, herring is managed in state waters under the Commission's Amendment 1 and in federal waters under the Council's Fishery Management Plan (FMP). Both plans contain complementary measures that establish total allowable catches (TACs) for each of the four Atlantic herring management areas as the primary control on fishing mortality. Since approval of the plans in 1999, however, managers and fishermen alike have become increasingly concerned about the potential for unlimited effort in the fishery. While the plans do include limits on vessel size, entry into the fishery remains unchecked. This series of scoping hearings is the first step on the part of the Commission and the Council to begin to gauge public sentiment on limiting access to the Atlantic herring fishery. The specific details of those hearings follow.

February 22, 2000 (7 – 9 PM)

New Jersey Division of Fish, Game and Wildlife
Cape May County Extension Office
355 Courthouse – South Dennis Road
Cape May Courthouse, New Jersey
Contact: Bruce Freeman at (609) 292-2083

February 24, 2000 (3 – 5 PM)

Rhode Island Dept. of Environmental Management
Radisson Airport Hotel
2081 Post Road
Warwick, Rhode Island
Contact: David Borden at (401) 222-6605

February 23, 2000 (1 – 4 PM)

Maine Department of Marine Resources
Trade Winds Hotel
Two Park Drive
Rockland, Maine
Contact: Lew Flagg at (207) 624-6341

February 29, 2000 (3 – 5 PM)

Massachusetts Division of Marine Fisheries
King's Grant Inn
Trask Road
Route 128, Exit 21N
Danvers, Massachusetts
Contact: David Pierce at (617) 727-3193

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The Atlantic States Marine Fisheries Commission (Commission) was formed by the 15 Atlantic coastal states in 1942 for the promotion and protection of coastal fishery resources. The Commission serves as a deliberative body of the Atlantic coastal states, coordinating the conservation and management of nearshore fishery resources, including marine, shell and anadromous species.

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PR00-03

Concern over increasing harvesting capacity and possible future overcapitalization, especially in the Gulf of Maine, has led to the discussion of developing a controlled access system for the Atlantic herring fishery. The TAC in the inshore Gulf of Maine (Management Area 1A) is only 60 percent of the reported landings that occurred in 1996 and 1997. Some fishermen believe that harvesting capacity in this area should be restricted to avoid problems that result from excess fishing capacity. One of these problems is a race to fish, or derby-style fishing, as increasing numbers of vessels try to catch their share of the TAC before the others. Besides being inefficient, the available TAC in Management Area 1A will likely be taken before the fishing year is over, disrupting the supply of herring to the various markets. In an uncontrolled system, as more vessels enter the fishery, more fishermen will fish for shorter and shorter periods of time in this area.

Recent Atlantic herring catches have not approached the proposed TACs in the other management areas. One objective of both the Commission's Amendment 1 and the Council's FMP is to distribute fishing effort to all management areas. Catches in Management Area 2, (Southern New England/Mid-Atlantic Region) have been relatively stable over recent years, while catches in Management Area 3 (Georges Bank) increased rapidly to 40 percent of the proposed TAC from 1997 to 1998. Both of these areas could absorb more fishing effort.

The Commission (through its Atlantic Herring Section) and Council are considering a wide range of options from continuing an open access fishery in all management areas to developing one of a variety of controlled access systems in one or more of the management areas. In a related action, the National Marine Fisheries Service, at the request of the Council and the concurrence of the Commission's Herring Section, established a September 16, 1999 control date for the Atlantic herring fishery in federal waters. As a result of this action, participants who entered this fishery on or after this date may be treated differently than those with a history in the fishery prior to the control date.

More specific information and details on these issues can be found in the scoping document available from either the Council or Commission. A copy of the document can also be obtained from the Commission's webpage at www.asmfc.org under Public Input. The public comment period for the scoping document extends until March 4, 2000. Comments should be forward to either:

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Washington, DC 20005
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OR

Paul J. Howard, Executive Director
New England Fishery Management Council
50 Water Street, Mill 2
Newburyport, MA 01950
Phone: (978) 465-0492 FAX: (978) 465-3116

For more information, please contact Dr. Joseph Desfosse, ASMFC Atlantic Herring FMP Coordinator, at (202) 289-6400, or Tom Nies, NEFMC Fisheries Analyst, at (978) 465-0492.